

**Draft**

**Best Practice Helpline for Farmers by Haryana State Agriculture  
Management Board**

## **Helpline for Farmers by Haryana State Agriculture Management Board**

### **Introduction**

After the pan India lockdown was announced by the Honorable Prime Minister of India, whole country went into a frizzy. Though lockdown has affected every individual, the worst affected are manual workers, daily wagers, senior citizens, homeless population, children and farmers. Since agriculture and allied activities are the everyday need of every individual, both harvester and user get affected by any kind of delay. The restriction of movement, closure of local Mandis, market for fertilizer, seeds, pesticides, and other farming related facilities like procurement were halted due to lockdown.

On the beginning of spread of pandemic and lockdown, the farmers were apprehensive about their crops getting destroyed at the time of harvesting and procurement. In absence of clarity on how to proceed further for farming related activities, farmers were in great dilemma to visit and take care of their crop, and to initiate the harvesting of Rabi crop ready for procurement in market. Lockdown crippled the daily process of earning a wage and purchasing the essentials. Hence, the Government of Haryana had a challenge to ensure that the farmers had clarity about all the matters pertaining to farming and the precautions they need to take while visiting Mandis.

Keeping in view the upcoming Rabi procurement season which starts from 15 April, the state government has set up a dedicated 24×7 Toll-free helpline 1800-180-2060 with 30 lines in the head office of Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board, Panchkula on 13th April 2020 to solve the queries during lock down situation. Normally, this toll-free number is operational from 8 AM to 8 PM throughout the year at the head office of HSAMB.

The basic objective of the helpline for farmers is to facilitate the farmers in following the social distancing norms and to resolve their queries related to procurement, infrastructure and Corona precautions.

### **Implementation of the Practice**

To achieve the objective of providing complete support to farmers and resolve their queries, the initiative of helpline was carried out in a systematic way. After providing a toll free helpline for farmers and he arhtiyas a team of Call Operators and Data Entry Operators was deployed to manage the daily calls, in three shifts i.e. from 7 am to 3 pm, 3 pm to 10 pm and 10 pm to 7 am to ensure the availability of calling facility round the clock. All the calls received on the Helpline number from the farmers are recorded by the operators.

The state government aimed to ensure safety of all farmers, labourers, arhtias or transporters against COVID-19. It agreed to procure grain of wheat, gram, mustard and sunflower of every farmer of Haryana at Minimum Support Price (MSP) and has distributed a layout plan for every

mandi and procurement centre for all districts.

The majority of queries and other issues addressed by the helpline includes:

1. Prices being offered by the government for procuring crops.
2. Designated places for operation of Mandis.
3. Travel restrictions and whether they need to get a pass for the same.
4. Availability of masks and sanitizers for the farmers.
5. Procurement starting date.
6. What if farmer is not able to reach on schedule date and time or if he comes without his turn.
7. If other farmer is registered on same land.
8. Complaints are also received regarding lack of social distancing amongst farmers-this issue was noticed by Ajrana Kalan Mandi in Kurukshetra.

The issues are resolved on phone or by personal presence. In case a complaint requires resolution by going to the field, then the designated resource persons are asked to resolve the same. For example, the necessary arrangements made by the HSAMB for procurement were satisfactory, but Mandis were not properly sanitized daily. If a problem cannot be resolved by the Call Centre operator, then the request is forwarded to the higher officials. Like, Panchkula district was facing problem with respect to lack of space for the farmers to sell their harvest. So, a meeting was held with the District Administration for the procurement of Rabi crops. Immediately 24 extension Mandis were set up in addition to the three permanent Mandis in the district of Panchkula.

### **Key Collaborators**

The key implementers and collaborators for the successful implementation of helpline for farmers consist of a nodal officer to ensure that all the queries are addressed. Under the nodal officer, various Data Entry Operators/Call operators work in 8 hour shifts. Technical person from HSAMB is also available for any additional help. Field officers look after the problem and resolve the issues by visiting the Mandis. In case, the query does not pertain to farming activity, then the call is transferred to the control room pertaining to essential services.

### **Cost effective Initiative**

Since the call operators are from HSAMB itself no outsourcing of work has been done, therefore the resource implications have been minimal. However, certain expenditure has been incurred at the districts where extension in number of Mandis was required. Further, arrangements have been made at the Mandis to provide masks and sanitizers to the farmers and perform their thermal screening at the entrance. Even though many of the masks and sanitizers are being given by NGOs, yet the government has to ensure that there is no shortage in the same which has necessitated some expenditure.

### **Outputs and Outcomes**

With the setting up of helpline for farmers, we can specify the concrete results achieved as outputs and outcomes in following points;

1. Helped farmers to get majority of issues resolved on helpline.
2. Streamlined all farmers' related issues on single platform.
3. The procurement process is being ensured to be hassle-free.
4. Appropriate information to all stakeholders regarding pricing of various crops
5. Social distancing measures undertaken by the administration have been ensured in the Mandis to ward off hazard of infection.

## **Lessons Learned**

### ***What worked well?***

The helpline is a one-stop solution for farmers for their queries regarding procurement, infrastructure and COVID-19. In the first five days, the call centre received more than 5700 calls seeking information regarding various issues. A performa has been devised which records name, father's name, village and district along with the mobile number of the farmer registered on "Meri Fasal Mera Byora" portal. 'Meri Fasal Mera Byora' portal is rolled out for registration of farmers by taking information regarding the type, area and production & arrival estimates of crops grown by them. Also, mobile numbers and bank details of farmers are updated on this portal.

This registration is important for timely collection of area and production estimates of various crops grown in state and the data is helpful for planning of handling, procurement and storage of farmers produce during season. The bank details are important for direct online payments of state and central assistance schemes to the registered farmers.

This data can also be used for planning of crop diversification, seeds/ pesticides/ fertilizers stocks & subsidies, ground water level management and various other crop and market management practices. The mobile numbers of farmers are used for informing them about the date and time on which they can bring their produce in the market for further auction and sale of the produce. Demand and supply estimates are made for planning of storage and allotment of grains to central and state pool.

### ***What did not work?***

Despite the best efforts of the state government to ensure that queries of the farmers were solved at the operator level itself, there were many problems raised by farmers regarding which the operator were clueless. For example:

1. The online registration system for farmers was allowing multiple entries. So, many a time more than one farmer got themselves registered on the same Killa number or both land owner and tenant were registered on same piece of land. This query had to be then

forwarded to NIC.

2. Registration of wheat and mustard was being done for the same land. No solution has been provided yet.
3. Adequate publicity was not provided to the helpline, so there was lack of awareness amongst farmers about this initiative.
4. Many a time, the helpline number itself was unreachable which defeated the whole purpose of the practice.

## **Conclusion**

With the implementation of 24-hour helpline service to farmers, the state government ensured the recording of all calls on the given performa for tracking accountability. Now, the farmers are aware about the extension Mandis, MSP, procurement of harvest, infrastructure. It has also benefited the farmers to resolve their queries while sitting at home and following the norms of social distancing. The regional containment supported in breaking the chain of Corona infection.

This intervention should be considered as a best practice, since it has provided:

1. Single integrated helpline: saves time and energy and leads to early resolution of farmers issues. Helpline also prompts district level officials for faster resolution.
2. Staff deployed in Helpline in three shifts for keeping helpline active at all times.
3. Two shifts of Mandi supervisors to resolve procurement issues.
4. Clear cut role mapping so that issues are passed on to proper authorities for resolution of issues.

## **Recommendations**

1. The telephone operators and data entry operators must be trained.
2. They must have clear SOP and performa to register complaints.
3. Appropriate classification of queries so that queries aren't misdirected to wrong officials.
4. Accountability of all officers must be fixed for the quick resolution of problems in the given time-frame.